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SIPDIS

G/IWI FOR ANDREA BOTTNER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [FI](#)
SUBJECT: FINLAND: NOMINATION FOR 2009 SECRETARY'S AWARD
FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 99729

¶1. (U) Embassy Helsinki submits the following nomination for the 2009 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage:

Full legal name of nominee: Miranda Vuolasranta

Job title/association:

- ¶I. Executive Director/Fintiko Romano Forum ry (FRF)
National Roma Forum of Finland
- II. Secretary General/Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
(Finnish Government) since 1998
- III. Vice-Chair/European Roma Forum, Council of Europe
- IV. Roma & Travellers Special Advisor/ Council of Europe

Date of birth: March 15, 1959
Country of birth: Finland
Citizenship: Finnish
Address: Makelankatu 58-60 A, FI-00510 Helsinki, Finland
Telephone: 358-44-33-77-102
Email: miranda.vuolasranta@romanifoorumi.fi
Passport: 17007176

¶2. (U) Justification for the award: Miranda Vuolasranta takes an activist and leadership role in Roma issues and in minority-related domestic policy issues in Finland; she is also a leader in Roma pan-European issues at a time when the OSCE platform contains a tenet on Roma tolerance (Finland is Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE for 2008).

Roma comprise 0.19 per cent of the Finnish population numbering about 10,000. They are a National Minority of Finland and in 1995, they were guaranteed the right to retain and develop their own language and culture by an amendment to the 1919 constitution. Roma population and statistics are only estimates because ethnic origin is protected under Finnish privacy law. The biggest challenges to Roma in Finland are discrimination in housing, access to restaurants, education, and employment.

Vuolasranta was born in Suolahti, Finland. She moved to Sweden to complete vocational training and worked there as a teacher for both Roma and Swedish languages. She returned to Finland in the 1980's. Vuolasranta proposed to the city of Helsinki that Roma language should be taught to the Roma children at the elementary school level. After some negotiations, teaching in Roma language started in 1989 and Vuolasranta was hired as a teacher. She created the first ABC book in Roma language for the Finnish public schools in ¶1995.

In 2001, Vuolasranta became more politically active and was elected to the Helsinki city housing board. She was a candidate for Parliament in 2006, but wasn't elected. No Roma have been members of parliament in Finland. In 2002, the Finnish League of Human Rights recognized Vuolasranta for her long-standing concrete work to improve human rights and

equality. Vuolasranta was the first ever Roma employee of the Council of Europe when she started work in its Roma, Gypsies and Travelers Division in October 2002.

Vuolasranta is committed to bringing the Roma voice into any decisions made about the Roma future in Finland and in Europe and expresses concern at all levels that the Roma be included in work done by governments toward their integration. One of her current concerns is the ethnic fingerprinting of Roma in Europe. Her work is not easy; she wears the traditional costume, a decision Roma girls make around age fifteen as a symbol of purity, and stands out when she goes to meetings and travels with delegations. The costume sometimes results in discriminatory remarks, but she is firm in her beliefs. She travels often, sometimes at the request of the Finnish government, to the Council of Europe and to other forums where she can champion Roma in their integration into European society and in protecting their human rights. She is a frequent speaker at these forums and events.

The mission strategic plan (MSP) for Helsinki contains two priorities that intersect with Vuolasranta's work: Enhancing Regional Stability, which means supporting the OSCE goal of Roma tolerance, and Enhancing Mutual Understanding, which means supporting Roma work toward integration in Finland and in Europe. Vuolasranta, in post's opinion, embraces tasks in Finland and around Europe that exemplify those goals.

13. (U) Post confirms that Miranda Vuolasranta agreed to this nomination.

BUTLER